

don't listen to everything you hear (it might be true) by the_crownless_queen

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Summary:

"Lydia, the pasty blonde who works down in accounting with whom Susan shares a pastry every other morning, swears that she once saw Nancy drop a guy at least twenty pounds heavier than her after he had tried to grab her ass just outside the office."

- post series, there are many rumors about Nancy Wheeler at her place of work. Some of them might even be true.

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Author's Note:

This is purely self-indulgent. This idea wouldn't leave me alone.

Also, I have absolutely no knowledge of journalism in the 80s/90s, so all of this might be wrong. And by might I mean probably is :p

I hope you still enjoy this story. I know I enjoyed writing it.

Susan's favorite thing about working at the *Post* are the breaks, and more particularly the gossip that happens then. Without those little talks she shares with the other girls in the building, working as a temp there would be ever so boring.

They talk about all kinds of things—from who was spotted wearing new shoes to who stole and ate Mr. Sarnell's chocolate cake yesterday—but as dumb as it sounds, Susan's favorite kind of gossip deals with romantic relationships, as in *who's dating who* .

And there is nothing better for that than Nancy Wheeler's love life.

Nancy Wheeler is one of the *Post* 's only female journalists. As such, she doesn't really work on the same floors as Susan and most of her ilk—as Susan's mother had called them more than once on their weekly phone call—but she always has a nice word when they meet in the elevator in the mornings.

Nancy also never hesitates to help the girls who want to complain about some guy on their service having wandering hands and giving leering looks.

Lydia, the pasty blonde who works down in accounting with whom Susan shares a pastry every other morning, swears that she once saw Nancy drop a guy at least twenty pounds heavier than her after he

had tried to grab her ass just outside the office.

Lydia'll tell that story to anyone who asks, though she only really tells it well when she's smashed.

"It was her, I'm tellin' ya," Lydia will start to say then, syllables slurring a little from the alcohol, blue eyes blown wide. "She wore those black heels she loves, you know the ones, and she was waiting for, like, a taxi. I was still inside and I swear, that smarmy guy just came outta nowhere. I mean, ya know the type, right?" Boy, did they ever know it.

"Well, that guy, he just, just..." She pauses there and starts miming the scene with crude hands gestures, before resuming, "He just put his grubby hand all over her skirt." She almost snarls in disgust, a sound echoed by whoever's in her audience.

"I know," she replies, nodding sadly, but her tone turns gleeful at the next part of her story. "I was going to go out and help—we all know men like that are different when we're not alone with them—but I didn't even have the time to do that. Nancy had it handled!"

She shakes her head. "I never even saw her move. One moment the guy was towering over her," she says, mimicking a threatening expression that never actually frightens anyone, "and the next he was sprawled out on the floor, clutching his nose, blood everywhere." There she mimes falling over with a loud pained growl, making everyone laugh.

"And there she was, Nancy Wheeler, standing above him and shaking her hand. It was *beautiful*."

Susan could just picture it too: Nancy Wheeler, brown hair floating in the breeze, haloed by the light of the setting sun, standing over her fallen enemy. She'd look like some kind of avenging angel. Like Lydia had said: *beautiful* .

Most of the rumors about Nancy do stem out of her romantic relationships, though—or rather, her lack of an obvious one. There are, of course, other rumors, like the one about her secret life as a spy

or her night job as an underground fighter, but those are mostly the fruit of Lydia's overactive imagination. Susan loves her, but she does get some crazy ideas.

The thing is, Nancy Wheeler's love life is a true mystery. She's worked at the *Post* for five years now, half as long as Susan herself has, and all anyone really knows is that she had someone in her life.

As Susan's mother always says, no woman makes herself look this pretty on a daily basis unless she has someone to impress.

As far as anyone knows, Nancy's not married, but there are still bets. They've shrunk to mostly two-ish options in the last few years, and the pot has grown suitably impressive.

Fiona, the tiny Chinese woman who works two cubicles away from Susan, insists that Nancy has a *thing* with one of the war photographers, Jonathan Byers. Her biggest argument is that they always arrive together when Byers is around, and they spend their lunch breaks together.

Mariah, the boss' personal assistant, counters that they arrive together because they get coffee at the same place, which is coincidentally where almost she gets her coffee.

"How do you explain the lunches, though?" Susan asks, to which Fiona preens.

Mariah, her dark skin glowing with smug pride, says, "They grew up in the same small town. They're childhood friends, or something."

"But—" Fiona protests, undoubtedly about to say that *childhood friends* hardly negates *lovers* .

Mariah shakes her head, eyes fever-bright with the look of someone who knows something you don't. "She's clearly with that nurse guy, too. I see him pick her up all the time when she leaves the office late."

"What guy?" Fiona asks, frowning and biting her lips nervously.

"The kind of sporty guy with the floppy hair and big puppy brown

eyes? Kinda cute in a sweet sort of way, I guess—if you're into white boys? Looks at Nancy like she's a marvel?" She frowns. "You've really never seen him around?"

She stares at them in disbelief when they all shake their heads. "I think his name is maybe Stan-something? Stone? Stane?"

Something clicks inside Susan's mind. She recalls a conversation one tired morning. "Steve," she blurts out, "his name is Steve."

"You know him, then?" Mariah's face lights up like she's just won the lottery. "So, am I right or am I right?"

Susan laughs. "Nancy said he used to babysit her kid brother and his friends, actually."

It's true enough, even if that certainly wasn't what Nancy had said about Steve that day. This, Susan had learned since then. But, really, she's not about to announce that Nancy had blurted out that Steve had kept her up all night long when Susan had absentmindedly asked her how she was.

Not when Nancy had been so weird about that admission after the fact.

"Apparently those kids used to get into a lot of trouble growing up," she says instead of anything else.

Mariah's face falls even as Fiona cheers up. Susan shares an amused look with Lydia, who, like Susan, never really declares for any favorite.

"I still think she's dating Steve," Mariah grumbles.

"Or Jonathan," Fiona counters with a smile.

Felicia, a plump woman who works all the way down in archiving, adds, "Or maybe she has better taste and sense than that and wants neither of them." She sends Susan and Lydia a conniving wink as everyone laughs.

"*If only*," Lydia mumbles wistfully, too low for anyone but Susan to

catch. It's a sentiment that Susan understands perfectly though, even if it does make her a little jealous to hear Lydia voices it so freely.

"I think she does like anyone," Lydia adds, louder this time.

Susan, who saw Nancy greet Jonathan and Steve with the same loving enthusiasm on several occasions and once spotted the three of them getting dinner together at a local restaurant, stays silent.

This isn't her secret to tell.

"You know I'm not really hiding, right?" Nancy asks her in the mornings after Susan sums up the gossip about her. It's kind of their weekly ritual by now, and Susan always enjoys it immensely. "I know the girls wouldn't really care."

"I know," Susan replies, smiling brightly. "And if you wanted to tell them, it wouldn't matter to me, but this way just makes coffee breaks so much more interesting. The wondering is fun."

"It is," Nancy agrees, a soft smile playing on her lips.

Susan smirks suddenly. "Now, if you really wanted to make those breaks unforgettable, you'd bring that photographer of yours along at least once. Have some fun, create some chaos..." She winks.

Nancy's floor rings and the elevator doors open. "I'll think about it," the brunette says, laughter clear in her voice as she holds the door open by keeping pressure on the floor button. "Not sure Jonathan'll go for it, though."

"Just bribe him," Susan replies, smiling knowingly. She shrugs. "I'm sure he wouldn't say no then."

Nancy laughs again. "I'll try," she says. After that, she wishes Susan a good day. The doors close slowly behind them and Susan tries (and fails) not to watch as Nancy walks into her office.

She sighs mournfully when the doors close and Nancy falls out of her

line of sight, and she waits patiently for her floor. Hopefully, Nancy will come through and liven up her day.

And if not? Well, she can always say she saw Nancy and Jonathan getting coffee together this morning. It's not even a lie, after all, and that kind of news always works to restart the Mariah-Fiona debate.